

THE DARKENING SKY

An Indonesian Short Story

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INTRODUCTION

Kipandijikusmin, the author of *Langit Makin Mendung* which we are presenting in translation here was born in 1941 of a Moslem family. Despite this religious background, his parents sent him to Catholic schools for his elementary and high school education. After graduating from high school, he entered the Maritime Academy and worked as a navigator for a few years. He did not feel very happy with this job, so he tried private business. In his spare time, he wrote short stories.

Prior to October 12, 1968, the name Kipandjikusmin in Indonesian literature was virtually unknown. Even those whose habits include reading literary journals did not see his name until November, 1967, when his first short story *Bintang Maut* appeared in *Sastra*, one of the literary journals in Indonesia. It is not unlikely that those who did read this particular issue found that *Bintang Maut* was not significantly different from any other story regularly published in *Sastra*. His second short story appeared in the same journal six months later. Entitled *Domba Kain* this story also passed virtually unnoticed. Not until October, 1968, did his name become nationally known. This was due to the publication of his third short story (actually the first part of a longer work) *Langit Makin Mendung* in the August issue of *Sastra*. Barely two months after its appearance, negative reactions began to rise. A group of Moslems in Medan reacted angrily to the story. This reaction was then picked up in various cities in Java, in particular Jakarta. Numerous articles appeared in various newspapers, followed by demonstrations in key places. This led the Ministry of Religious Affairs to issue a press release denouncing the publication of the story. The editor of *Sastra*, H. B. Jassin, was taken to court to defend his position.

The pressure from the community was so strong that on October 22, 1968, Kipandjikusmin made a public appeal requesting that *Langit Manking Mendung* be considered non-existent. With it also went the continuation of this story, *Hujan Mulai Rintik*, which he had sent to *Sastra*. *Langit Makin Mendung* may, therefore, be his third and last story.

The controversy over this short story is obviously not a simple issue as it involves not only religious matters but also variables found in the society. Basically, the Moslems' strongly negative reaction to the story is based on their belief that the personification of God is a violation of Islam. Kipandjikusmin was considered to have done even more harm by writing in a style referred to as *sembarangan*, that is, a style in which an author presents serious matters in a casual and careless manner. The dialogues between God and Prophet Muhammed, God's wearing old-fashioned gold-rimmed spectacles, the collision between Prophet Muhammed's vehicle and the Russian sputnik, plus some other points in the story were considered an insult to the Moslem religion in general and the Moslem followers in particular.

One author, Nazwar Sjamsu, went even further. He doubted very much if Kipandjikusmin's motives stopped at the point of insulting the Moslems. Nazwar proved that *Langit Makin Mendung* was oriented more toward Christian thinking than that of Islam. The question to be answered is, "Did not Kipandjikusmin in fact try to promote Christianity by discrediting Islam?"

In defense of what he did, Jassin pointed out that the accusation regarding the personification of God was due to a misunderstanding of the nature of arts. *Langit Makin Mendung* is not a book of history or religion from which one seeks truth, but rather a fiction that springs from the

imagination of an individual. To seek truth or accuracy in a work of art is, therefore, a futile thing to do.

The variables found in the society may have contributed to the controversy. In a society where there is greater stability, perhaps a story like *Langit Makin Mendung* would create very little, if any, reaction. The sensitivity of this story may have increased when real names such as Muhammad s.a.w., Soekarno, Bill Palmer are used as they make it more difficult to separate fiction from reality.

Despite the fact that the story has been officially retracted, the stain of the spilt milk remains. Two books, from which we gather our information here, have now been published. The first, *Heboh Sastra 1968. Suatu Pertanggungan-Jawab*, was written by Jassin where he defends his position as editor of *Sastra*. Using Jassin's book as the point of departure, Nazwar Sjamsu presents his case from a completely different angle which, naturally, ends in a completely different conclusion. His book, *Mendjeladjah Heboh Sastra 1968. Menuju Titik Kebenaran*, presents a counter-argument.

All in all, *Langit Makin Mendung* and the ramifications which it has generated are very interesting to observe--perhaps not so much from the literary point of view as from the sociological impact which the story has created.

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Translator's Note

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Marian De Walt Morgan

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Eventually they had become rather bored with being retired prophets in heaven. So they drew up a petition requesting (not demanding) that the pensioners be given leave in turn to descend for a fact-finding mission to earth, which was said to be increasingly lively.

"We really need a refresher course. Too much happiness is torture for men who are used to fighting. We are not angels or turtledoves. Our lips are already weary and stiff, praising your greatness hundreds of years without pause."

Reading the prophet's petition, Allah was compelled to shake his head, mulling over the discontent inherent in human nature. He summoned the first signatory, Muhammad from Medina, Arabia. On earth people usually call him Muhammad s.a.w.¹

"Hail to thee, Lord!"

"Is there really anything missing in this heaven of mine? A million graceful, beautiful nymphs, rivers of milk, lakes of honey. Golden apples, silver citrus trees. Little platinum deer, birds with feathers of diamonds and opals. Everything belongs to you all, equally!"

"In truth, there is more than enough happiness, plentiful and full to overflowing.

"Look at the emerald grasses there, the pearl flowers blossoming.

"You are wealthy indeed. And mankind so poor, so miserable.

"Look at the silk carpet you're stepping on. The Cashmere robe and turban you're wearing. The Aladdin slippers that can fly. I gave you all those beautiful things!"

Muhammad lowered his head, thinking that the life of man was only rattan woven together to catch alms from Allah. How undignified were they who endlessly hoped for pity. He remembered that when he first arrived in heaven he had been himself only a small naked soul.

"What are you actually looking for on earth? Immorality, hypocrisy, hunger, weeping, and hatred are raging there."

"I would like to do research," Muhammad answered softly.

"Concerning what?"

"Lately, so few of my people have been entering heaven."

"Oh, that's only normal. Most of them are from tropical areas, if I'm not mistaken?"

"Yes, You are indeed all-knowing."

"The dry season is too long in those parts. The heat of the sun has baked their dull brains too long." He placed His old-fashioned gold-rimmed spectacles on the gold table.

"How is that, Lord?"

"Your people are thoroughly sun-struck. Most of them go mad, others die outright."

"Allah forgive me! What happens to them?"

"The first are busy clowning around in mad-houses."

"And the dead?"

"There is a confession of faith² stamped in their passports. The devil king is compelled to refuse visas for hell to those unfortunates."

"It is puzzling that they have never asked for asylum here."
Muhammad frowned slightly.

"The troops of hell have chained their feet to their own gravestones."

"What can their sins possibly be? What a miserable fate for my people, Lord!"

"Their souls are said to reek of *Nasakom*.³ They are poisoned by *Nasakom*!"

"*Nasakom*? What poison is that, Lord? What cursed devil is poisoning their souls?" Muhammad s.a.w. appeared very disturbed. His fists were clenched. "Usman, Umar, and Ali!⁴ Sharpen your swords!"

Allah just nodded, with an understanding and fatherly smile. "Find out the real facts yourself. As for the swords, I think they are no longer in demand at the flea market in Jeddah harbor. The creator of *Nasakom* already has an atom bomb, you know."

"In short, I am permitted to descend to earth?" (He wasn't afraid of the atom bomb.)

"Of course. Ask for a travel permit from Soleman the Wise in the secretariat. You should know that, according to Botes⁵, the police and the civil guard make a nuisance of themselves, and relish fussing over travel permits."

"Can't they be bribed?"

"No, they're not like police on earth. Take Gabriel along with you, so you don't get lost!"

"Yes, Lord." He knelt and bowed, full of happiness.

* * *

The moment before the departure, heaven was astir with activity. The authorized document transferring the office of Head of the Muslims in heaven had already been signed. Abubakar was named as the receiving party. And much more still remained to be done.

"Hail, Your Grace, which route has Your Excellency chosen?" the angel Gabriel asked respectfully.

"To where my body was laid to rest--Medinah--do you remember? I want to count the travellers on pilgrimage. Here we only know two kinds of figures, one and infinity."

All the denizens of heaven saw them off at the airfield. Touching desert songs were sung, though there weren't any lovely women belly dancing. Who knows how many millions of hands Muhammad s.a.w. had to shake!

The prophet Adam (peace-be-with-him)⁶, being the eldest, stepped up to the microphone. He said that the fact-finding mission of Muhammad s.a.w. would mark a new epoch in the history of mankind. Great was the hope that a deep understanding would soon be woven between the inhabitants of heaven and earth.

"Finally, brothers and sisters, we must make maximum use of the on-the-spot observations of Muhammad (may the Lord bless him and give him peace.) Yes, brothers and sisters in holiness! As those who made it to heaven, we must not forget the struggle of our brothers and sisters on earth against the temptations of hell's devils and their sycophants. We must help them with prayers and constructive thinking, so that they may all be drawn to the side of the Lord. That's all I have to say. Go in peace, Muhammad. Long live the union of the Peoples of Heaven and Earth!"

"*Ganjang!*"⁷ millions of voices responded in unison. Muhammad quickly climbed onto the back of the *buroq*, a winged horse which had been his vehicle when he ascended to heaven. As quickly as lightning the *buroq* flew toward earth, and Gabriel, who was getting on in years, followed panting behind.

Suddenly, a sputnik flew by in outer space.

"What's that thing?" The prophet was astonished.

"People on earth call it sputnik. There are three men inside it, Apostle of Allah."

"Men? Coming to greet me, no doubt!" (He was pleased.)

"No, on the contrary, they are citizens of the largest nation of infidels on earth. Followers of Marx and Lenin, who deny the Lord. But they are brilliant."

"What unfortunate men; may the Lord forgive them," he prayed. "I'd like to take a close look at those infidels. Let's go, *buroq*!"

The winged horse flew swiftly across the sputnik's orbit. With his fiery sword, Gabriel signalled the sputnik to stop for a moment. But of course, the Russian sputnik had no brakes. A collision couldn't be avoided. The *buroq* and the sputnik were smashed to smithereens: no noise, no remains. The bald-headed⁸ members of the aeronautical institute in Siberia applauded happily.

"We hereby report that the Russian sputnik has succeeded in making physical contact with an unknown planet. There is a minor communications problem..." (So it was heard over a Radio Moscow Broadcast.)

Muhammad and Gabriel were catapulted downward, but luckily their fall was broken by mounds of clouds, soft as cotton wool.

"Oh dear, oh dear, Hell will have three more residents." Muhammad whispered sadly. For a moment he cast a glance below. His heart suddenly leaped in horror.

"Gabriel, what level of Hell can that be over there?"

"You are mistaken, Your Excellency. Beneath us is not Hell, but the most sinful place on earth, called Jakarta. It is the capital

of a country with a hundred million lazy and stupid citizens. But all the same, they claim to be free of illiteracy."

"I've never heard that name. Which is more sinful, Jakarta or Sodom and Gomorrah?"

"They're about equal."

"Oh! Isn't that greenish area over there the color of hell-flames?"

"No, Sir! That's the men's and women's volunteer force intended for smashing the neighbor country, Malaysia."

"Are any of my flock in Malaysia?"

"Almost all of them are, except of course the Chinese."

"If that's so, then the people below are infidels!"

"Not at all; 90% of the people are in fact Muslims."

"90%!" The prophet's face shone. "Ninety million of my followers! Beloved Muslim men and women! But I don't see any mosques of decent size. Where do they pray on Fridays?"

"The problem is that it's ninety million only according to haphazard earth statistics. In Abubakar's records in heaven, there are not a million true Muslims among them!"

"How strange! Are they crazy?"

"No, just a little unsound. Now they're going to smash a neighbor country of the same religion!"

"How strange!"

"It's strange indeed."

"Well, let's go, Gabriel, and leave this accursed place behind us quickly. I'm so homesick for Medina!"

"Your Excellency doesn't want to investigate the causes of this peculiar state of affairs?"

"No, not in this place!" he answered brusquely. "My research plans are for Cairo."

"You are truly the last prophet, aren't you, O Muhammad?"

"It is so written in the Book of Allah," answered the prophet modestly.

"But the people below there have already made a prophet of someone else."

"Why should I care about false prophets?"

"Your followers have almost yielded to the teachings of the false prophet, *Nasakom*!"

"*Nasakom*! So this is the source. You say that my people are yielding? Nonsense!" Anger colored his face.

"Yes, Islam is threatened. Aren't you concerned and sad?" The voice of a devil was heard, followed by boisterous laughter.

The prophet gazed upward. "The Word of Allah will never fail. Whatever the state of Islam, it is and forever will be, though earth be destroyed!"

The voice of the prophet thundered mightily, echoed on earth in the valleys, on the mountain peaks, and in the rubber plantations, and whirled across the open sea. The echo rose even to heaven, and was answered respectfully in unison, "Amen. Amen. Amen." Hell shook, and trembling devils held their ears closed. The rumble and crack of thunder and lightning sounded in turn.

"All right, let's go, Apostle of Allah!"

Muhammad didn't want to leave the cloud on which he stood. His heart was doubtful and sorrowful. His countenance was dark, as dark as the cloudy sky around him.

Gabriel peered questioningly at him, but didn't dare to speak.

* * *

The rainy season still hadn't arrived. In Jakarta, many people caught influenza, with its spells of dizziness and vomiting. *Naspros* and *APC* tablets shot up in price, to say nothing of vitamin C pills and penstrip ampoules.⁹ It was said that ever since the factory was nationalized by the people, the *Naspro* agents were really in a fix. Only Chinese pharmacies and insiders with connections could get their hands on allotments through back alleys.

An evening newspaper, *Warta-Bhakti*, wrote that in Bangkok a thousand people had died of flu, but about the Jakarta flu, the Minister of Health said nothing.

The next morning, the Minister of Health, still silent, was called before the President, alias Great Leader of the Revolution.

"Well, General. Does this flu kill people or not?"

"No, *pak*.¹⁰"

"So it isn't dangerous?"

"No, *pak*. It's communists who are dangerous, *pak*!"

"Oh, you! You're just a communist-phobe."

Still, though it wasn't dangerous, the Jakarta flu wasn't as clever as the police. It couldn't be bribed, and it raged on with no respect for rank. From beggar and prostitute to Minister's wife and President, it attacked arbitrarily. The palace servants were shocked, coordinating Ministers adopted sad and solicitous expressions, and military commanders reversed their caps,¹¹ perplexedly witnessing the Great Leader of the Revolution throwing-up like a newly-pregnant woman.

In a flash, doctors were summoned, and telegraph wires were busy seeking secret communications with Peking.

"Request your immediate dispatch of famous Chinese physicians; our Great Leader is seriously ill. Possibly on the verge of death."

Comrade Mao on his throne smiled a little smile and, assuming a compassionate expression, comforted his axis comrade struggling with death.

"We hope for a rapid recovery. With this the Chinese people have dispatched several physicians and healers to investigate your illness. We have enclosed a strong medicine, thousand-year-old *ginseng* root.¹² It is guaranteed to be effective. Your faithful friend: signed, Mao. (Also entrusted to physicians a small gift for Aidit.¹³)"

Apparently thanks to the special qualities of the medicine, the patient gradually recovered. As a religious person, he did not neglect to give thanks to the Lord who had blessed him with such a good friend as Mao.

A party was arranged. The Chinese physicians were given special seats. For a while the host forgot his religion, and polished off the platters of pork and frogs' legs. The *kyais*¹⁴ who were present smiled wryly.

"Ladies and Gentlemen! The neo-colonial imperialist press proclaimed that Soekarno was seriously ill. Even near death, they said. (The guests laughed, laughed at the stupidity of the neo-colonial imperialists.) Well, my friends, they must be very eager to see their biggest enemy dead. If Soekarno died, they'd think Indonesia would be easy to overrun, as easy as taking charge of their own navels, like the Tengku's country.

"But," (he pointed to his chest) "look at me, friends, Soekarno is still in great shape. Soekarno's not about to die yet, I say." (There was tumultuous applause, and the Chinese physicians felt obliged to join in too.)

"God willing, I won't close my eyes until the neo-colonial imperialist 'Malaysia' project is shattered and smashed to dust." (more applause.)

The informal program began. With his old bones, the President danced the *lenso*¹⁵ with girls specially invited from Menteng.¹⁶ The *patih*s¹⁷ and Ministers didn't want to seem less stylish. So only the military chiefs watched with concern as the Commander-in-Chief leaped about like a little boy just told he didn't have to get circumcised.

His personal doctor whispered, "It's all right. Good for his kidneys; that way His Excellency's kidney stones won't act up again."

"Sing! Sing, please, *Pak!*" the girls cajoled.

"Oh, all right, But you join me, okay?" He had the airs of an ostrich.

Siapa bilang Bapak dari Blitar.

Bapak ini dari Prambanan.

Siapa bilang rakyat kita lapar.

"Malaysia" yang Kelaparan ... !

"Mari kita bergembira ..." ¹⁸ Off-key tunes wafted away with the smell of champagne.

In a dark corner of the palace a Chinese physician was whispering with one of the Ministers. "He seems very cheerful."

"A sure sign he's nearly dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes, dead. Or at least paralyzed. Comrade Mao has indicated that this is the time."

"But we aren't ready yet."

"Then when? Don't wait until Nasution's clique¹⁹ has the lead!"

"At least wait for the right moment."

"Well, see you later." The Chinese physician smiled smugly. They parted.

The clouds were thickening in the sky, and a few stars shone dimly. The party ended with the song *Kembang-Katjang* sung by a wrinkled 68-year-old granny.

"An old friend of the President!" people murmured. Then the guests excused themselves, their full stomachs preceding their dragging feet; a few vomited drunkenly in the parking lot. They belched, stinking of alcohol, and the *kyais* uttered automatically the requisite "praise be to God."

The ministers left later with the girls, to look for rooms to reserve for a few hours. The servants busied themselves collecting the leftover food to take home to their children and wives. The palace dogs snored, completely satiated, and drunk on Malaga. Beggars outside the palace wall gazed in sadly, blaming fate for making them men and not dogs!

* * *

Rumors that Soekarno was paralyzed and close to death spread quickly from mouth to mouth, like leaping flames in a fire of squatters' shacks on Chinese-owned land. They even reached the ears of Muhammad and Gabriel, who had changed themselves into a pair of hawks. They

were perched on the top of a golden tower made in a Japanese factory. The view in all directions was unobstructed.

"*Allahuakbar*,²⁰ the false prophet is close to death." Gabriel flapped his wings.

"But his doctrines are not. *Nasakom* has even blemished the souls of the soldiers. It has already infected some of my *kyais*," he snorted with disgust.

"What is Your Excellency worried about?"

"Why did you choose for us to have this hawk shape, and not to be human? We're going to have to do so much for my followers!"

"You must remember, Your Excellency, in Jakarta every nose has to have a residence permit. It would be bad for us to get caught in one of those clean-up raids."

"Better to be a soul, free and safe."

"For this earth affair we are obliged to become a part of the earth."

"What for?"

"So that truth is not completely bare before us."²¹

"But we still can't appear as humans?"

"Yes, it would be difficult to be human and still follow the feelings and thoughts of men."

"I know!"

"And in this present manifestation, our eyes are sharp, our movements fast!"

"Yes, you're right. May Allah bless you, Gabriel. Let's circle again. However sinful it is, I'm beginning to like this city."

A pair of hawks flew through the twilight over a dusty Jakarta, filling their lungs and noses with the smoky exhaust fumes of a

thousand cars. Above Senen market²² hung the odor of garbage heaps piled up in putrid, filthy mountains. The filthy stench grew stronger above Senen station. The prophet alighted hesitantly on a corrugated iron roof, while Gabriel made a perfect circle over the freight cars of Planet District.²³

Prostitutes and whores were busy dressing up. Powder to fill their pock-marks, cheap red lipstick and bridal clothes. Beneath the freight cars a few old whores were groaning--menstruating again, and now they had syphilis. Their crotches were covered with boils, and flies gathered to suck the pus. Twilight sank into night, with stars splotching the clouded sky. A young man entered the bathing area, which was enclosed by a chest-high bamboo wall, to wash off his come. A fat girl whose back was covered with a rash followed him in, urinated, and washed herself off. Soon after, a *jengkol*-like²⁴ odor rose up. Her armpits had a sweaty ammonia smell, from her acrobatics on a rickety iron bed.

In another room an old goat was busily pumping away on the belly of a fifteen-year-old girl. The girl, indifferent to his hugging, was busy hunting for lice and singing a Malay song.

Civil defense members were busy on their round, looking for protection money.

"What are you reflecting on, your Excellency?"

"In a country where Muslims are the majority, they are so openly indecent!" He shook his head.

"It's probably the influence of the *Nasakom* doctrine! The false prophet says that prostitutes too are pillars of the revolution!"

"Ai, the low, filthy animals! They should be stoned to death. Haven't Abubakar, Umar and Usman conveyed my commands to the *kyais* here? Whoring! What filthy people these are! Stones! Get me stones!"

"Stones are expensive here. One cubic meter for two hundred *rupiahs*--it would be a pity to use them just to throw at adulterers. What's more... ."

"Look for them in the rivers and on the mountains!"

"All the rocks in the world wouldn't be sufficient to stone the adulterers. There aren't even enough to build a mosque, don't you see?"²⁵

"Nevertheless, this must not be allowed!" The prophet stamped his foot.

"Prostitutes are needed in this country, O Prophet."

"Allah forgive you! Has the devil already gotten hold of you, Gabriel?"

"No, Your Excellency, I still have my wits about me. Hear my story. A poem could be written, going like this:

Prostitutes of Jakarta,
Double your rates
And they'll be alarmed;
Strike for a month
And they'll be shaken;
Soon they'll commit adultery
With their brother's wife.²⁶

"Crazy poet! Indecent!"

"It's the truth that speaks. It is precisely open and cheap fornication that checks the latent indecency in their hearts."

Muhammad was quiet, his face surly.

In front of the Remaja bookstore, the atmosphere was tense because a pickpocket had been caught red-handed. *Becak* drivers led on the crowd to beat him up. The pickpocket was knocked down, stood up, and was knocked down again, asking for mercy, while inside he was laughing at the ridiculousness of his own stupidity. It was an unlucky day--he had made the mistake of snatching the empty satchel of a corporal in civilian clothes. Unlucky days always meant fist fights, kicks, and derision, which wasn't very pleasant. But that was just routine. The Senen police didn't pay any attention to the daily spectacle; people attacked each other for the fun of it. Suddenly a soldier appeared and pushed forward. The pickpocket was dragged away and taken off somewhere.

The crowd missed their toy, and felt bewildered.

"He's a big tough in Senen; one of Sjafl's gang, the king of the pickpockets!"²⁷

"That man was stealing, wasn't he!" (The Prophet's observation was astute.)

"Yes. People here call him pickpocket or snatch."

"Why did they only beat him up? The thief's hand should be cut off! That was Allah's command to me!"

"They don't have swords, O Prophet."

"But surely they could import them!"

"They have to be thrifty with foreign exchange. The importation of swords is restricted for the decoration of Naval cadets."

"Then what do these people use for war?"

"Empty slogans and rifles on credit from Russia."

"That country of infidels?"

"Yes, and some are from America. A country of people who worship property and dollars."

"They must both be equally evil!"

"And equally clever in arousing hatred in the world."

"The world has become mad!" He sighed deeply.

"Yes, the world is already old."

"Whereas the day of reckoning will be long in coming."

"There's still plenty of time, O Prophet!"

"Plenty of time for what?"

"To do something about our boredom in heaven."

"Well, that's true. In fact this spectacle is rather engaging, although foul. I'm going to suggest that it be shown on T.V. in heaven."

The two hawks flew on through the black night.

"Gabriel, look! There's someone running over there; I think something's wrong."

"I have the same feeling. Let's follow him, O Muhammad."

A moment later they alighted on a tall areca nut tree. Their sharp eyes watched the motions of a man wearing glasses.

"Who is he? Why is he so happy?"

"The generals call him Durno.²⁸ He's Minister of Foreign Affairs, doubling as chief spy."

"Who do you think he is, actually?"

"He's just Togog.²⁹ A henchman of greedy kings."

"Ssssh: what letter is that he's holding?"

"A document."

"Document?"

"The Gilchrist document³⁰ --I heard it was left behind at Bill Palmer's house."

"Gilchrist? Bill Palmer? They sound like horses' names."

"No, they're an Englishman and an American."

"Aah."

Below them Togog was jumping for joy. This time he was really fortunate, to get a magic formula gratis. He was certain that the crumpled paper would create a worldwide uproar. He couldn't stop kissing it. His thoughts were lost in daydreams, and suddenly he smiled to himself.

"History will record in golden ink: *Sang*³¹ Togog successfully exposed the plots of the rebellious knights of his Majesty the King." He imagined the tumultuous cheers of the people and beggars in Senayan.³² "Long live Togog, the crown prince! Long live Togog, our future king!"

Once more he smiled to himself. The old king was about to die, and young King Togog would ascend the throne, as soon as the generals were cornered.

He kicked the door of the intelligence headquarters heavily three times. That was the secret signal.

"How are you, Togog, Your Excellency?"

"Make a lot of photocopies of this document! But careful, it's top secret. Don't leak it to the other intelligence agencies. Especially not to Army Intelligence."

"But is this authentic or not, *pak* Togog? A laboratory examination ...?"

"Ha! What a fuss you're making! Follow the order, period! Understand?" he snapped.

"Very good, your Excellency." He feigned fear.

"That's my boy. My intelligence officers must be disciplined and loyal without reservation to me, and without considering gain or loss. All in the name of the unfinished revolution!"

"Yes, *pak*--er--Your Excellency."

"So, when will you be finished?"

"In a week, for sure."

"Why so long?"

"For security reasons, *pak*. That's what I read in the detective comics."

"Fine, you're working hard to improve yourself. The thing is, I must toss those copies before the nose of the commanders at the briefing with the Great Leader of the Revolution tomorrow. Can you hurry?"

"I could do it for tomorrow, as long as there is overtime money in advance." He made the motions of counting out money with his thumbs.

"Togog straightened his uniform, which looked like a god's.³³ He took out a wad of tens of thousands of *rupiahs* from a back pocket. Laughing, he slapped his assistant on the back.

"Keep it quiet! This document will really shatter the neo-colonial imperialists and their sycophants in the country."

"Who are they?"

"Who else? Naturally, 'our local army friends,' so-called.³⁴ Clear, isn't it?"

After Togog left, the magic formula was read in turn by wild demons and stupid devils, worshipers of the great God Mao. For years now they had been secretly haunting the headquarters of the Central Bureau of Intelligence.

Meanwhile, rumors were becoming as popular as cheap rice. The poor and the cockroach-greenshirts³⁵ pounced on them, swallowing without even chewing.

"Soekarno is nearly dead from paralysis; the capitalist-bureaucratic generals want a coup, complete proof is in the hands of the party!"

Unfortunately for them, the Chinese medicine-men's prophecies were way off. Soekarno wasn't paralyzed, but only a little lame. And lameness never killed anybody. No signs of death appeared; on the contrary, Soekarno seemed increasingly young and fit. People said he was getting a lot of injections of H-3, a medicine that gave one the energy of a horse. *Sang* Togog was disappointed to see His Majesty ever more diligently making speeches, singing with great zeal, dancing vigorously and leaping into bed with who knows how many wives in succession.

On the appointed day, the Great Leader of the Revolution and Togog were both perplexed at Bogor. The briefing with the commanders had ended with a feeling of deadlock.

"Maybe this document is false, Togog." The Great Leader of the Revolution was cross.

"Oh, that's impossible, *pak*. My assistant said it's the genuine thing."

"You've already examined it thoroughly?"

"Yes, *pak*. My assistants said that they racked their brains and burned incense night and day."

"Have they also consulted confidentially with *dukun-dukun klenik*?"³⁶

"More than that, the *jailangkung*³⁷ gave such a positive picture!"

"What did it say?"

"The usual--'the best-known are always released from custody'...!"

"Oh, him again! I've already emasculated Nasution with all the trivial tasks of playing Minister for Security and Armed Forces Chief-of-Staff.³⁸ He's no longer dangerous."

"Yes, but the *jailangkung* says that it's the CIA that's pulling the strings behind 'our local army friends'."

"Gilchrist is an Englishman, isn't he? Why is the CIA mixed up in it?"

"It's like this, *pak*. They've all plotted. It's all because of our taking Comrade Mao's advice and opening up a new front in the confrontation of Malaysia. The world knows, Hanoi can breathe now. Uncle Ho is fairly free from American pressure."

"Why is that?"

"Officially we're confronting British Malaysia. In fact, it's America we're hurting; they have to split their navy in two. One part continues to threaten the People's Republic of China, the other threatens us!"

"Which is bigger, the one threatening us or the People's Republic of China?" He was apprehensive.

"Us. That's why the Army is so reluctant to harass Malaysia. They're afraid America will gain control of this country."

Soekarno bowed his head. Togog's explanation made him realize that he had been completely fooled by his Chinese friends. The relieving of pressure from America meant that China's defense expenses could be transferred to production. And isolated Indonesia was a giant wastebasket for receiving Chinese rubbish that wasn't wanted on the market.

Chen-yi, who liked to talk nonsense, had not followed up on sending an atom bomb, the pay-off for fighting Malaysia. Suddenly the Great Leader felt sick.

"Togog, call the Chinese envoy here. Now!"

"It's the middle of the night, *pak*."

"To hell with the middle of the night! Take all the guards if you're afraid."

Like a thief urinated upon,³⁹ Togog left the city of Bogor in the cold night. His hopes to share a bed with his mistress in Cibinong were shattered. Two hours later a Chinese who looked like a meatball soup vendor was led in. He was only wearing pyjamas, his breath stank of Chinese whiskey and his sweat smelled of pork.

"Why did you call me so late? Must be a lucky strike!" The Chinese envoy spoke Indonesian well. And the Great Leader was pleased by his cleverness.

"Yes, comrade. This very night you'll have to go home to the country of your ancestors. And don't come back here before you get the present from Chen-Yi. Understand?"

"Come on, what is the atom bomb for?" The Chinese envoy knew by heart Peking's instructions. "Your army can't handle it yet. Maybe it will end up as scrap iron and be sold to Japan. Ah, friend of Chairman Mao, it would be better if you formed a fifth force.⁴⁰ Sharpened bamboo spears would be more suitable for your people."

"What do you think, Togog?"

"I'm afraid bamboo spears would be more suitable to puncture the intestines of the Chinese foreign nationals here." Togog was angry.

"What do you mean?" asked the Great Leader, and the Chinese envoy simultaneously.

"America is threatening us all because of your government's suggestion that Malaysia be crushed. You understand?" The Chinese nodded.

"And up to now your government has only supported us with empty talk!"

"We're not forcing you, brother. If you want to stop confrontation, go ahead."

"That's impossible!" The Great Leader was angry. "True or false, 'Gog?"

"I agree, *pak*! Confrontation has to continue. So drastic action is even more justified now.

"What kind of drastic action?" The Chinese narrowed his already narrow eyes.

"As soon as the Americans land, I'll order all Chinese foreign nationals' necks cut!" he snapped.

"Ah, don't be like that, Comrade Haji⁴¹ Togog. You're a man of religion!"

"The hell with it! The bomb must be sent immediately."

"All right, all right. I'll leave tonight."

The Great Leader of the Revolution couldn't help but marvel at Togog's strategy. They embraced each other.

"You are truly the best Foreign Minister in the world."

"But Yani⁴² is the best general, *bapak* said yesterday."

"Really, what do you think is going on? Is he also reluctant to attack Malaysia?"

"I'm sorry, Your Excellency, the matter isn't yet clear. The fact is that the situation's dragging on and on only benefits China."

"Is Yani hesitant?"

"Sort of. Because the Communist Party is going along, he's supporting the confrontation. Whereas the majority of the army thinks this action has no justification."

"Then what do the CIA and their 'local army friends' want to do?"

"They have to stop the confrontation. How they want to do it, we don't know. Probably they'll try to flatter us first with an important diplomatic envoy. If that fails, they'll use the unique CIA method."

"How is that?"

"The chief elements in the confrontation will be eliminated. Soekarno, Subandrio, Yani, and the Communist Party will have to go!"

The Great Leader of the Revolution nodded, both because he was sleepy and because he agreed with Togog's analysis.

The next day, Togog babbled on and on before the impoverished people who thirsted for sensationalism. Like a roadside medicine hawker, he often forgot which propaganda was plagiarized and which was his own invention.

"Brothers and sisters. At this very moment there is complete proof in the hands of His Excellency the President and Great Leader of the Revolution concerning the efforts of the neo-colonial imperialists to destroy us. The CIA has already commanded its band of executioners who live in the country to annihilate its important enemies. Be on guard, brothers and sisters, they are going to wipe Soekarno, Subandrio, Yani, and other progressive-

revolutionary people from the face of the earth. These three men are precisely the ones considered most dangerous by the bosses in London and Washington.

"But never fear, brothers and sisters. I myself am not afraid, in the name of the President and Great Leader of the Revolution and in the name of the unfinished revolution. I'm willing to sacrifice body and soul. Once more, be on guard, because those executioners are among you."

The crowd applauded wildly. They were proud to have a deputy prime minister of Togog's caliber, who wasn't afraid to die. For a while they forgot their hungry stomachs, feeling instead anger and boiling rage over the insolence of the neo-colonial imperialists.

The meeting concluded with dancing and the burning in effigy of figures resembling the Tengku. English and American flags, sewn with great effort by their women at home, were trampled and torn with an extraordinary feeling of victory and satisfaction.

After it grew boring, they scattered one by one. The young people remained, sharply surveying the scene like pickpockets. They wanted to find out who the neo-colonialial imperialist executioners were that Togog had just spoken of.

At Harmoni⁴³ a group of *becak* drivers were busy trading rumors, talking politics. While in Russia, Lenin had said that cooks too should be aware of politics, in Jakarta it was *becak* drivers who were obsessed with political gossip.

"They said the Generals' Council wanted to stage a coup. Now they want to murder Yani--which is true?"

"Who's the leader of the Generals' Council?"

"Pak Yani, of course."

"So Yani is going to murder Yani. How come?"

"Oh, shut up, what do you know?" a hoarse voice spoke up.

"Lucky our Foreign Affairs Minister is such a leader! The neo-colonial imperialists' plan can be punctured."

"He's not afraid to die!"

"Sure, he's had his fill, hasn't he? How many girls has he screwed!", the hoarse voice interrupted again.

The others weren't surprised or angry. It was as if it were only normal for a Minister to play around with girls and other people's wives.

* * *

The attempt to crush Malaysia, which got no-where, was reported to Peking by the Great Leader of the Revolution.

"Comrade of the axis. Please pack off the atom bomb quickly, without delay. Our army refuses to fight--the generals are busy moonlighting and the soldiers are too--with their rifles."

An answer from Peking never arrived. What did flood in were textiles, matches, flashlights, slippers, toothpaste, toothpicks, and other Chinese goods.

Soekarno was suddenly inspired to emphasize standing on one's own feet.
44

The people who were already hungry were scolded for not wanting to eat anything but rice.

"But brothers, I know of many foods other than rice that are full of vitamins. Sweet potatoes, corn, cassava, mice, snails, and

even lizards, precisely the most efficacious medicine for eczema. Do you think I eat rice every day? No! It's only occasionally that your Great Leader of the Revolution here eats rice once a day. It's even been a month since I've eaten meat. Just ask General Saboer!⁴⁵

"There's *Pak* Leimena over there," (he pointed to a man who was thin and wasted.) "He prefers sago to rice. Look at *Pak Seda* with his sturdy body." (He pointed to a man whose body was about as strong as a *becak* driver's.) "He can't work if he hasn't had his corn for breakfast."

The next morning the newspapers quickly made lists of ministers who ate corn, complete with their photographs.

Unfortunately the people didn't believe it any more; they relied more on the palace servants. Soekarno's breakfast was in fact not rice, but toast prepared by a French chef in the Hotel Indonesia. In order to prevent a relapse of high blood pressure, he did indeed avoid meat. He was forced to eat only an egg fried on one side along with a little Arabian honey specially ordered as an accompaniment to the toast. It was followed by an apple sent from Moscow by Kosygin.

Nevertheless, the people were not surprised or angry. It was as if it were only normal for a President to lie and say whatever he pleased.

On the average, Indonesians are indeed forgiving and good-hearted. The Leader's lies and mistakes get an open-minded response. Their hearts are like the sun; however cloudy the skies are growing, its rays still seek to touch the earth.

FOOTNOTES

1. In Arabic, *ṣallāllāhu alaihi wa sallam* : may the Lord bless him and give him peace. The expression is generally spoken by Muslims after the prophet's name. Here, the author uses the abbreviation s.a.w. as if it were a title or degree.

2. There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet. This is evidently a highly subversive phrase, unacceptable to the immigration officials of the Kingdom of Hell.

3. This acronym is composed of the words for nationalism, religion, and communism. *Nasakom* was a slogan officially talked of since 1957 and used by Soekarno to encourage nationalists, Muslims, other religious groups, and Marxists to form a united front to complete the revolution.

4. Usman, Umar, Ali: three of Muhammad's four closest Caliphs, or "Protectors of the Faith." Abubakar is the fourth.

5. The meaning of this word is not known. It may be an acronym.

6. In Arabic, *alaihissalam*, generally spoken by Muslims after the name of the prophet Adam.

7. A word coined during the early 1960's confrontation with Malaysia. It is close in meaning to "crush", and perhaps here "go to it!"

8. The expression "bald-headed" is used for someone with brains, for scientists, etc.

9. Penstrip ampoules: ampoules containing liquid penicillin and streptomycin

10. *Pak*, or *bapak*, means father, and is an affectionate, respectful form of address for someone who is older or higher in status than the speaker.

11. Generally, wearing the hat reversed is associated jokingly with a serious event in many Armies.

12. A kind of root traditionally thought to aid sexual potency

13. Communist Minister close to Soekarno, and Head of the Indonesian Communist Party, who was implicated in the abortive 1965 coup.

14. One who is knowledgeable on Islamic matters: a venerated scholar or teacher of Islam.

15. A dance from Menado of which Soekarno was very fond.

16. An elite, high-class area of Jakarta.

17. Originally the second man after the king. Here it is used to refer to the "yes-men" around Soekarno.

18. The four line verse was composed by Soekarno in the early sixties:

"Who says *Bapak* is from Blitar?

This *Bapak* is from Prambanan.

Who says our people are hungry?

Malaysia's the one that's starving...!

Mari kita bergembira: "Let's enjoy ourselves...." This is the opening line of a *lenso* song.

19. General Nasution was at the time Minister for Security, and Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces.

20. *Allahuakbar*: "God is great."

21. The meaning of this seems to be that truth would be unbearable if they saw it clearly--which they cannot do as earthly creatures.

22. A squalid area of downtown Jakarta where an underworld of pickpockets, prostitutes, and thieves flourished.

23. A district in Senen near the railway station known for its prostitutes.

24. A foul-smelling fruit.

25. This must refer to the Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta whose construction was started in the 50's but not finished when this story was written.

26. These lines are quoted from W.S. Rendra's famous poem "Prostitutes of Djakarta--Unite", written in the mid-1960's.

27. Sjafii was a military leader of a gang of pickpockets. The pickpocket mentioned here is actually being rescued from the mob.

28. In the Javanese version of the Mahabhārata, Durno is the mentor of both the Kurawas and the Pandawas, but favors the Pandawas in general. However, because of the Kurawas' gifts to him, Durno feels obliged to take their side during the war. He is seen as a brilliant man who simply happened to be on the wrong side. During the communist upheaval, Indonesian Foreign Minister Soebandrio was considered as the Durno of Peking. Soebandrio was also head of the *Badan Pusat Intellegensi*, the Central Bureau of Intelligence.

29. Again in the Mahabhārata, Togog is one of the two servants of the Kurawas. His brother Semar serves and advises the Pandawas. In a contest, Togog lost and was obliged to take the Kurawas' side. Togog has no advisory power and little competence in any field. He is seen as a weak man, but not an evil one.

30. The Gilchrist document was a letter purported to be sent by Sir Andrew Gilchrist, the British ambassador, to the Foreign Office in London. It contained the passage: "It would be as well to emphasize once more to our local friends in the army that the strictest caution, discipline and co-ordination are essential to the success of the enterprise." In May 1965, Foreign Minister Subandrio called on Soekarno to show him the letter which had reached the Central Intelligence Bureau through the mail, and which was supposedly found in the house of an American subject, Bill Palmer. Its authenticity is disputed.

31. *Sang* was originally an honorific title, but when used in modern writing it gives an ironic and pejorative effect.

32. A huge sports complex outside Jakarta which contains a stadium seating thousands, often used as a place for mass meeting.

33. The original term *seragam-dewanja* literally means 'god's-uniform'; it refers to the fact that the Mahabhārata character Togog is the incarnation of a god, and it is also a comment on the pomposity of Togog.

34. This phrase is taken from the above quoted Gilchrist letter.

35. Disparaging name for soldier.

36. *Dukun* is a traditional Indonesian healer and soothsayer. A *dukun klenik* specializes in supernatural powers.

37. The medium in a kind of seance, Chinese in origin. An overturned basket is clothed with a shirt or jacket, to which a key and a piece of chalk tied to a stick are attached. The participants sit around the *jailangkung*, burn incense, and summon spirits. When

the spirits arrive the chalk writes answers, on a board held up to it, to questions asked by the participants.

38. General Nasution was uneasy about growing communist influence and the communist plan to arm workers and peasants. In 1962, he was appointed to be Armed Forces Chief-of-Staff to "separate him from his main base of support" according to Bernard Dahm (*History of Indonesia*, New York: Praeger, 1971, p. 211). His previous position of Army Chief-of-Staff was given to Major-General Yani.

39. The image in this simile, which I have translated exactly, is that of a thwarted thief, who, crouching unseen in the dark, has to suffer in silence the indignity and distress of someone's coming outside to urinate precisely where he is hiding.

40. In February 1965, Soekarno announced a plan to arm workers and peasants, to "save the revolution" in case of need, as a fifth force in addition to the army, navy, air force, and police. Commanders of the Armed Forces were hostile to this plan (Dahm, p. 224.)

41. A title given to those Muslims who have completed a pilgrimage to Mecca. The author uses this word to show the Chinese envoy's abrupt change of manner toward Togog in an amusing way.

42. Yani was the general who succeeded Nasution as Army Chief-of-Staff. Soekarno felt he could rely on General Yani's support for his policies, but like other military commanders, General Yani was very uneasy over increasing communist influence in the 1960's. He was one of the six generals assassinated by the communists in the abortive September 1965 coup.

43. A crowded intersection in Jakarta.

44. Soekarno was accustomed to giving national day speeches whose themes became slogans for the year. 1965 was *Tahun Berdikari*, or the Year of Standing on One's Own Feet. *Berdikari* is an acronym formed from a syllable from each of four words: *berdiri diatas kaki sendiri*.

45. General Saboer was the commander of the Palace Guard.